

Mr. LEAHY. I ask unanimous consent to be able to continue as in morning business for about 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WELCOMING THE DALAI LAMA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I feel honored to be a Member of the Senate and to be President pro tempore. But I cannot think of any greater honor than this morning, when I was able to introduce to the Senate an old and dear friend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Marcelle and I have been friends of His Holiness for decades. We count that as a great treasure, as does Senator FEINSTEIN, whom I saw earlier on the floor, another long-time friend of His Holiness, along with her husband.

I have watched him for so many years in his representation of the Tibetan people. He is joined on the floor by another Buddhist, Senator HIRONO of Hawaii. The gracious comments of Senator REID reflect how people feel about him. I think of the faith of his people and how they are moved. I told his Holiness of this story when I walked through the streets of Lhasa, Tibet, years ago, and a man holding a small child saw me and pointed to my camera and held up a picture of His Holiness.

He was risking being imprisoned for having that. But he insisted I take his picture. I did. I have given that photograph to His Holiness. I told him the story, that when we asked the man why he risked prison to show the picture of His Holiness, he said: Because people have to know. The world has to know the great faith of the Tibetan people longing for the autonomy they deserve to practice their faith.

Fortunately, they have as a symbol of that faith the Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, a man who touches everybody's conscience. He touches this Catholic every time I see him. It goes beyond whatever faith you are. He is a gift to the world. I am so honored to have been able to introduce him here today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, with His Holiness here in the Senate Chamber, there are a number of Senators who would like to say hello to him. So based on that, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 9:44 a.m., recessed until 9:46 a.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREE- MENT—EXECUTIVE NOMINA- TIONS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that following action on S. 1917, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Nos. 504, 513, 640, and 547; that the Senate proceed to vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order listed; that there be 2 minutes for debate prior to each vote, equally divided in the usual form, and that the votes be 10 minutes in length; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FLOOD INSURANCE AND VETERANS MEDICAL CLINICS

Mr. VITTER. I rise to talk about two very important issues for the country and for Louisiana. The first is fixing the national flood insurance system, getting it right. The good news is I think we are well on a path to doing that effectively. The second is veterans medical clinics, two of which are in Louisiana. They have been held up for completely bureaucratic reasons and aren't moving forward as they need to serve the veterans in Lafayette and Lake Charles, LA, and in about 25 other locations around the country.

First, flood insurance. Only a couple of days ago the House passed by a huge margin, over 300 votes, a strong bill to permanently fix the National Flood Insurance Program. Those aspects of the so-called Biggert-Waters act passed over 1 year ago but are unworkable, clearly creating problems on the ground.

This is great news, because unless we fix those very real problems, we would have major problems on our hands in the National Flood Insurance Program,

not only in Louisiana, not only in Florida, and not only in the Superstorm Sandy area, but in every State in the country—every State. It is not a question of if these issues are coming to your State, it is a question of when and exactly to what extent.

Over 1 year ago, we passed the Biggert-Waters act. That was an important reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program. It also included reforms, and many of those reforms needed to happen to stabilize the financing of the program.

What no one understood adequately then, however, is that those well-intended reforms, in practice, in implementation by FEMA, would lead to unsustainable, completely unaffordable rate increases in a significant number of cases.

That only began to be understood in the months after the bill was passed as FEMA started to implement it, as FEMA came to homeowners, came to State authorities, came to Members of Congress, and began to lay out some of the rates we would see in certain areas.

I am not talking about modest rate increases. We need modest rate increases to stabilize the financing of the program. I am talking about completely unaffordable rate increases in some cases—flood insurance rates going from \$300 a year to \$11,000 a year or \$19,000 a year or \$26,000 a year on a modest middle-class home and on a middle-class family that followed the rules every step of the way. We can't allow that to stand.

First, it is fundamentally unfair. As I said, these middle-class families followed the rules every step of the way. They built to the right elevation when they built their homes, never let their premiums lapse, and never let their insurance lapse.

In that context, for them to be hit with truly unaffordable rate increases—increases that could literally cause them to have to walk away from their home in some significant number of cases and not be able to afford to stay there—is just plain wrong.

Secondly, it is completely counterproductive, because one of the ways we have stabilized the National Flood Insurance Program fiscally is to grow the program, to have more folks paying premiums, and to have more folks covered, not fewer. This aspect of Biggert-Waters, which would lead to truly unaffordable rate increases in a significant number of cases, is unworkable from the very vantage point of the goal of Biggert-Waters to stabilize the system. So we can't let that stand for that reason either.

The good news is, because of those very real problems, both the Senate, and now the House, have come together in a major bipartisan way to fix the issue. The Senate acted about 1 month ago passing meaningful legislation. I was an original coauthor and a strong supporter. As I said a few minutes ago, the House acted two nights ago—Mardi Gras night in Louisiana terms—to take strong action to fix this program.

The House bill is stronger and more significant in several respects, mostly because the reforms in the House bill are permanent. It is not a timeout, as the Senate bill was. It is a permanent fix that creates a much higher degree of certainty and permanence immediately.

Also, the House bill is fully paid for with a modest premium increase on everybody's premiums—very modest, completely affordable—to make sure that all of these changes are paid for. Because of these aspects of the House bill, because of the permanent nature of the fix, the fact that we create certainty and predictability immediately moving forward for homeowners and real estate markets is actually the preferable approach.

I urge all of us in the Senate to take up that bill at the soonest possible moment. Specifically, I urge the distinguished majority leader to put it on the floor, to create time on the floor, so we can deal with the House bill absolutely as soon as possible.

I know there will be some attempt to obtain unanimous consent to pass the House bill immediately. Of course, I will consent; I am all for that. But, realistically, I don't think that is going to happen on the Senate floor. The Senate bill had some objectors, the Senate bill had some opponents, and so does the House bill.

Realistically, I urge the majority leader to create the time on the Senate floor to take this up and move through the process absolutely as quickly and as expeditiously as possible. That is the way it is actually going to work and that is the way it is actually going to happen.

I hope we can do that as early as next week. I strongly support our consideration of this bill on the Senate floor as early as next week.

The second national and Louisiana issue I want to discuss has to do with veterans and veterans' health care, which we have been talking about on the Senate floor for some time, specifically the need to move forward with 27 fully approved, fully authorized, VA community-based clinics that have been stalled because of bureaucratic problems. Again, these clinics are around the country: two in Louisiana, one in Lafayette, one in Lake Charles. These clinics have been approved by the VA and have been in their plan for some time. They are fully authorized. We thought they were fully paid for until, first, the VA made some bureaucratic mistakes to delay the Lake Charles and Lafayette clinics in particular; and then, out of the blue, the CBO changed the way they score all of these clinics, all of these issues, and created another bureaucratic hurdle.

Again, the good news is we came together in a bipartisan way and have a solution to those purely bureaucratic hurdles so that all of these clinics can move forward expeditiously. The House specifically passed a bill that would take care of these bureaucratic hur-

dles. They passed it on the consent calendar by a whopping bipartisan margin.

So I come to the floor urging all of us to do the same. Specifically, I have an amendment to the bill that also makes it even more fiscally sustainable by having a pay-for for any conceivable cost to this bill, and that is what my amendment would do.

This VA clinic legislation was in the Sanders veterans bill last week and it was in the Burr alternative. It was in both the Democratic and the Republican veterans packages. Neither of those packages passed. The Sanders bill was defeated on a budget point of order, which I supported because I don't think it is properly paid for and is sustainable both in terms of our budget and, even more important for veterans, how the veterans system works and handles its current patient load. The Burr bill never even got a vote.

We have disagreements about those larger packages. Those are real, substantial disagreements, but in the midst of that I would hope we can agree to what we can agree on, and these VA clinics certainly fall into that category. We have cleared all objections to this VA clinic piece specifically. We have addressed all issues having to do with these VA clinics, in part through my amendment at the desk. The only possible objection I know of is the fact that a larger package is not passing.

I understand there are big arguments about that larger package. Those are legitimate differences of opinion. I don't think that should stand in the way of our agreeing to what we can agree to and moving forward with an important piece of the puzzle for veterans health care—these 27 community-based clinics around the country.

In that spirit I will be asking for a unanimous consent agreement whereby we would take up the House-passed bill. Again, this House-passed bill was actually on the consent calendar, passed with a whopping bipartisan majority. We would adopt my amendment at the desk, which addresses some fiscal concerns with the bill, and we would then pass it through the process. This would be our coming together and agreeing to what we can agree on. That is what the American people want us to do as we work on all other aspects of health care and veterans' benefits covered by both the Burr and the Sanders bill debated last week.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 3521

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3521, which was received from the House; that my amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SANDERS. Reserving the right to object.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I thank very much my colleague from Louisiana for bringing forth this very important issue. Senator MARY LANDRIEU from Louisiana has also raised this issue, as have many colleagues.

My friend from Louisiana is absolutely right; this is an important issue and this is an issue that should be passed. But I would say to my friend from Louisiana that last week we brought forth the most comprehensive piece of veterans legislation in the modern history of the United States of America, and that legislation dealt with many issues raised by veterans organizations that represent millions of men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend our country.

Let me very briefly—very briefly—touch on some of those issues included in this comprehensive piece of legislation that lacked three votes. We had 56 votes. One Senator was absent and would have voted, so we need three votes to pass this. This would have addressed some of the serious problems in the claims backlog that my friend from Louisiana is more than familiar with. It would have addressed the crisis of advanced appropriations to make sure if there is ever again another government shutdown that no veteran—disabled veteran and no veteran who is on a pension—would fail to get their check.

This legislation also included an enormously important provision expanding the caregivers program, so wives and sisters and brothers taking care of disabled vets finally get the attention they deserve.

That legislation would have addressed a terrible problem facing some 2,300 families, where men and women who were injured in Iraq and Afghanistan and can no longer have babies receive help through in vitro fertilization or other processes or adoption, if they want the help, in order to have families.

The legislation also addressed the very serious problem that many of our young men and women are not getting the education they need because States are not allowing them to get instate tuition.

That legislation addressed many other crises, which is why that legislation had the support of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and in fact virtually every veterans organization in the country.

So let me say this to my friend from Louisiana, and I say this sincerely. What I will not do is dismember this piece of legislation. What I will do is work with my colleague and other Republicans who voted against this comprehensive piece of veterans legislation so we can bring to the floor a bill that reflects the needs of millions and millions of veterans who are hurting.

I look forward to working with my colleague from Louisiana on a comprehensive bill, but at this point I object to his proposal.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, reclaiming the floor and my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. I find that very regretful. Of course I will continue to work with the Senator from Vermont. Of course I will continue to work on that larger package, which I have been actively involved in for some time. I will continue that. But basically the Senator from Vermont is holding a very tiny piece of this hostage—a tiny piece that will have no impact whether it is in or out in terms of passage of that broader bill.

What is happening is we have a piece that on its substance, on the substance of the clinics themselves, no one objects to; a piece that passed the House by a huge overwhelmingly bipartisan majority. Yet it is not going to pass here today or perhaps anytime soon because it is held hostage over larger fights.

I will continue to work on that broader veterans piece. I support a broader veterans bill, if it is styled the right way and if it is fiscally responsible. I support the Burr alternative. I will continue to look for common ground between that Burr alternative and the Sanders bill. But whether this clinic piece is in or out of that discussion will have zero impact on passing that piece. I honestly think it will have zero impact.

I find it very unfortunate we can't get this done in the meantime; that what my colleague considers the perfect is now the enemy of the very good, and we can't serve veterans by coming together on what we do agree on and acting in the meantime.

With that, I urge my distinguished colleague from Vermont to reconsider over time, as we work on this larger veterans bill, because we could pass this today. The House would pass the slightly modified version immediately, and we would be moving on with 27 community-based clinics around the country which veterans in all of those communities desperately need.

Additionally, I wish to thank Senator INHOFE for his active cooperation in moving these clinics forward.

Mr. President, my good friend, the senior Senator from Oklahoma, is in support of vital legislation that recently passed the House of Representatives, H.R. 3521 the Department of Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization Act of 2013. The legislation authorizes 27 Department of Veterans Affairs clinics across this country including much needed clinics in Lafayette and Lake Charles, LA.

Mr. INHOFE. I agree with my good friend from Louisiana that this legislation, H.R. 3521, is critical to providing the best treatment for our country's

veterans, and I believe that it is the government's duty to honor the promises made to our veterans. In Oklahoma, roughly 340,000 veterans call our State home, attend our churches, and contribute to our communities. On behalf of Oklahoma, we are humbled by the immeasurable dedication of each and every one of them.

Therefore, this legislation also authorizes funds for an improved Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Tulsa, OK. The current building lacks the space to care adequately for the large number of veterans that receive their medical treatment at the facility. Due to the size of the facility, services such as the Behavioral Health services are located several miles away. Lastly, the parking lot capacity is not acceptable. This bill will improve this clinic to include primary care, women's health, imaging, specialty care, physical therapy, audiology, optometry, mental health, prosthetics, dentistry, and a pharmacy.

Mr. VITTER. Yes, it is absolutely critical for Louisiana veterans as well that both of the clinics in Lafayette and Lake Charles are authorized and finally built. To clarify, both of the Louisiana clinics are not new projects. They would actually be nearing completion, but because of bureaucratic mistakes committed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, they have faced significant delays. Two years ago, due to an unexpected change by the Congressional Budget Office—CBO—in how it estimates the cost of VA clinics, these two vital clinics were then stripped out of a VA authorization bill. Veterans in Louisiana have waited long enough. It is time for the United States Senate to act. This legislation makes it so veterans are not forced to drive a 100 miles to receive much needed services.

Mr. INHOFE. With the passage of this bill, there will be funding to improve and expand our VA clinics in 19 States across the United States, including Louisiana and Oklahoma. The facilities would then be able to provide the services that were promised to our men and women that were willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to serve in the defense of our country. Many of our veterans have paid the price with scars, some visible while yet many go unseen such as post-traumatic stress disorder—PTSD, depression, and traumatic brain injuries—TBI. I urge our colleagues to remember that it is our Nation's duty to care for them in return.

Mr. VITTER. This legislation makes important reforms to the VA leasing process taking into account CBO concerns, and it has received vast bipartisan support in the House passing 346-1. I urge my colleagues to provide the same support for our veterans in the Senate and pass this legislation now by unanimous consent.

With that, I yield floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me reiterate my hope that the Senator from Louisiana will in fact work with us. It is my intention to see this bill gets to the floor again before Memorial Day. I think we owe it to the men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend this country to address their serious needs.

The issue of these 27 medical facilities is one of those needs, but there are many more, and I look forward to working with the Senator from Louisiana and other Senators to do what the veterans communities want us to do and to go forward on what will be the most significant piece of legislation to take care of the needs of our veterans passed in several decades.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 12 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I, too, want to lend my voice—after listening to the discussion that just occurred on the floor—because I don't think there is any group of Americans who are more deserving of our support than the men and women who have worn the uniform of this country and so bravely and courageously defended America's freedom and our democracy. I hope, such as my colleagues who spoke just a minute ago, we can come to an agreement that would allow us to do the things on which we agree.

There are so many things on which we agree—I think 80 percent of the debate last week between what the Senator from Vermont proposed and the Senator from North Carolina proposed were the same—that we ought to be able at least to do those we agree on and address some of the very vital and urgent needs our veterans community has. So I would lend my voice to supporting efforts to get things moving.

There is a bill that has come over from the House of Representatives that addresses many of these issues, not as comprehensively as was proposed last week by the Senator from Vermont and the Senator from North Carolina. Obviously, we have some issues that need to be addressed that will support and help those Americans who have borne the cost of battle for our country and defended America's freedoms, but we should work together to find that agreement and to move legislation forward that would address those needs.

THE BUDGET

Mr. President, I come to the floor, however, to talk about the pain that ObamaCare and the Obama economy are causing Americans.

CBS News/New York Times released a new poll last week finding there is widespread dissatisfaction with President Obama: 59 percent of the American people are disappointed in the President's Presidency, the poll found, while 63 percent think the country is on the wrong track.

Just 38 percent of the people in this country approve of the President's handling of the economy, and 39 percent approve of his handling of foreign policy.

When it comes to the President's signature law, ObamaCare, just 6 percent—6 percent—of the American people think the law is working well. A whopping 92 percent support changing the health care law or repealing it altogether.

In similar news, Gallup reported last month that its Economic Confidence Index was negative for every single State. In other words, the majority of Americans in every State have a generally negative view of the economy. Only in DC—in the District of Columbia, home of too many disconnected Democratic politicians—did Gallup find a net positive view of the economy.

Needless to say, the American people are, to put it mildly, dissatisfied. Why are they dissatisfied? Because they spent 5 years waiting for the relief they were promised and it hasn't arrived.

A Pew Research Center poll in September found that 63 percent of the American people believe the Nation's economic system is no more secure today than it was before the 2008 market crash. The same poll also found the majority of Americans report household incomes and the job situation have hardly recovered at all from the recession. President Obama may have inherited a difficult economic situation, but he has had 5 years to make it better. Instead, he is making things worse.

Over the past 5 years household income has declined by \$3,600. Income inequality is at its highest point literally since the Great Depression. The number of Americans receiving food stamps has soared from over 32 million to now more than 47 million—almost 48 million Americans receiving food stamps. That means that one in five—literally one in five—American households is on food stamps. Ten million Americans are unemployed, almost 4 million of them for more than 6 months, and the labor force participation rate is at Jimmy Carter-era lows, thanks in part to literally thousands of Americans who have simply given up hope of ever finding a job and dropped out of the labor force altogether.

Then there is the President's health care law. The President promises a health care law with lower costs while allowing you to keep the plan and the doctor you like. In reality health care costs have skyrocketed and Americans have been losing their doctors and their health care plans in droves. Seniors are being hit hard by cuts in the Medicare Advantage Program and lower income seniors are being hit the hardest. Meanwhile, businesses are struggling with the law's burdensome taxes and regulations, while workers struggle with reduced hours and fewer opportunities.

A recent report from the Congressional Budget Office found that the

President's health care law will reduce the number of full-time workers by up to 2.5 million over the next 10 years. Then there is last week's report from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services that found that 11 million small businesses are going to see workers have their premiums increased as a result of ObamaCare.

Yesterday, in an attempt to improve the Democrats' steadily worsening election prospects in November, the administration announced yet another—another—ObamaCare delay for selecting health plans, as well as a pardon for the administration's union friends. It is no wonder Americans are so unhappy.

Despite the abundance of evidence that their policies have failed, the Democrats and the President continue to dismiss Americans' stories. In fact, the Senate majority leader had the gall the other day to get up on the floor of the Senate and say every single ObamaCare horror story is untrue. That is right. Instead of looking at the overwhelming evidence that ObamaCare just isn't working, and maybe rethinking his support of that law, the majority leader decided to accuse every single American who has had a bad experience with ObamaCare of lying about his or her story. Now that is a lot of denial right there.

They say the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and hoping for a different result. Yet that is exactly what the Democrats and President are doing. Instead of looking at the evidence of the past 5 years and rethinking their policies, Democrats are piling on more of the same. For Americans hurting for jobs and opportunities, Democrats have recently taken to advocating a hike in the minimum wage—a policy, I might add, that the Congressional Budget Office said would result in up to 1 million fewer jobs and a policy that would hit the lowest income workers the hardest.

Then there is the President's budget. The President's budget proposal would have been a great opportunity for the President to rethink some of these failed strategies of the past 5 years and to focus on controlling spending and promoting economic growth. Instead the President produced a political document that panders to the far leftwing of his party and eschews any type of meaningful reform.

His budget won't control spending. Instead, it increases spending by 63 percent over the next 10 years and it adds another \$8.3 trillion to our \$17 trillion debt. To pay for some of that spending, the administration is proposing even more tax increases, over \$1 trillion worth of new tax increases on top of the \$1.7 trillion in tax increases the President has already gotten since he came to office.

The administration has even backed away from changes to our broken entitlement programs, such as gradually raising the eligibility age for Medicare, which would have helped put the Medi-

care Program on a stronger financial footing going forward.

And as for balancing the budget, well, that is a fantasy. The President's budget doesn't even pretend to balance. With 2 years left in his Presidency, it appears the President has given up on governing and resigned himself to playing election year politics. His lame-duck budget will further grow the Federal Government while the middle class continues to shrink.

If the President and Democrats really want to help Americans the way they claim, there are real steps they could take right now to start turning our economy around and putting Americans back to work. Instead of a job-killing minimum wage hike, they could support initiatives to reduce the cost of hiring and give businesses incentives to hire workers. Instead of perpetually extending unemployment benefits, they could support legislation, such as a bill I introduced to provide relocation resources to allow the long-term unemployed to move to areas where the job market is stronger, and strengthen Federal worker training programs. This would help give the unemployed what they really want—not months of meager government benefits but steady, good-paying jobs with the potential for growth.

Speaking of jobs, if the President wanted to create jobs immediately, he could easily do that today with a stroke of the pen that he talks about: Approve the bipartisan Keystone Pipeline and the 42,000-plus jobs it would support. All it would take is a stroke of the pen he keeps talking about.

Then there is trade promotion authority. The President did talk about trade promotion authority in his State of the Union Address, but he abandoned it shortly afterwards as a result of some Democrats' political concerns about pushing the policy in an election year. Trade promotion authority would help farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and job creators gain access to 1 billion new consumers around the globe. If the President were serious about creating jobs for Americans, he would be urging the majority leader to take up this bipartisan legislation today.

Finally, the President should be supporting bipartisan efforts to repeal the costly medical device tax in his health care law, the tax on pacemakers and insulin pumps. According to a recent study, more than 30,000 jobs in the medical device industry have been affected by this burdensome provision in the law. If this tax isn't eliminated soon, even more jobs in the industry are going to be lost or sent overseas.

It is not surprising that the American people are unhappy. ObamaCare and the Obama economy have done nothing to ease the struggles Americans have faced since the recession, and instead of proposing new initiatives, the Democrats and the President continue to push for more of the same, and to double down on the same failed policies.

Well, 5 years is long enough. It is time for Democrats to abandon their failed economic experiments and to work with Republicans to pass legislation that will actually create jobs and opportunities and put Americans back to work. We can do that. We can do that today. The President can pick up the phone he talks about and call the majority leader. Ask him to bring up any one of these initiatives I have mentioned on which there is broad bipartisan support: the Keystone Pipeline, trade promotion authority—initiatives that would grow jobs—repealing the medical device tax. There were 79 votes in the Senate on amendments to the budget last year in support of appealing that onerous tax.

There are things we can do together, that we can do today to create jobs and grow and expand this economy, lower the cost of hiring people in this country, so we can get more Americans back to work with good-paying jobs that will help lift them higher in their economic circumstances and give them a better and a brighter future. I hope that is what the President will choose to do rather than following through on so many of these election year ploys, if you will, that are simply designed to help win elections come election day rather than doing something that is meaningful to help middle-class families and the American people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF ROSE EILENE GOTTEMOELLER TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Rose Eilene Gottemoeller, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11:20 a.m. will be equally divided between the majority leader and the Republican leader or their designees.

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. It is always good to see my distinguished colleague from New Jersey presiding before the Senate.

I come to the floor to support the nomination of Rose Gottemoeller for Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security. She has been the Acting Under Secretary since February 2012. It has been 2 years now.

She is a distinguished public servant who over her long career has played a vital role in addressing the critical proliferation challenges the United States faces. In my mind, it would be difficult to find a person more appropriate to take on the variety of new and old proliferation threats we face.

Rose Gottemoeller was the chief U.S. negotiator of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russian Federation. During the Clinton administration she served in the Department of Energy overseeing its nuclear proliferation portfolio. During the critical period of 1993 to 1994, she was at the National Security Council overseeing the denuclearization of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus—a topic of some importance given the current crisis in the Ukraine.

As we consider this nomination, it is worthwhile reviewing the array of issues and nonproliferation threats we face.

In Syria, we are facing ridding the regime of its chemical weapons arsenal, seeking to keep the pressure on Assad to fulfill his commitments and verify that Syria is in full compliance with provisions to destroy its chemical weapons production, mixing, and filling. The United States, along with the rest of the international community, is engaged in the complex process to transport and safely destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile.

Second, on the issue of Iran's nuclear program, we are entering a critical stage in negotiations. As I noted in remarks on the floor last month, we must, in my view, maintain the pressure on Iran to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. As part of our negotiations, we must insist on the most stringent measures to verify whether Iran is in compliance with agreements it has signed. We need to ensure that any final deal that might be signed can be precisely monitored, providing us a warning signal at the first hint that Iran is seeking to achieve nuclear breakout.

Third, in terms of North Korea, the United States has stated that we will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, which would potentially unleash an arms race in the region and threaten our security and the security of our allies.

Fourth, we have to maintain and sharpen our efforts to prevent terrorists from getting their hands on and/or using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.

Finally, despite all of our recent difficulties with Russia, it is vital that we

continue to implement and verify the arms control treaties we have with them, particularly the New START treaty. These treaties are not something we do as a favor to Russia; they are a vital measure for limiting the potential dangerous nuclear escalation that might occur in a crisis.

For all of these reasons and many others, we need to confirm the nomination of Rose Gottemoeller so she can fully assume her new responsibilities as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security. She has all the authority necessary to represent U.S. security interests in the international community.

Having said that, I know there are differences within the Senate about the question as to how we should approach nonproliferation issues, but regardless of those differences, I believe there are a number of issues on which we can all agree.

We can all agree that we face a new and more complex set of proliferation threats—the threat of terrorists getting their hands on nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, the danger of regional armed nuclear adversaries, such as North Korea and Iran, using their nuclear capabilities to blackmail our partners and allies.

In response to these threats, we all agree we need a more modern and flexible nuclear enterprise and updated policies that can respond to these new threats as well as the old threats we face. I hope we can agree that we need to confirm this nominee to be in a position with authority to help update and implement those policies with the full authority of the position.

What I would say to the Senate is that at the end of the day there are some who may disagree on verification and compliance procedures or on the nature of the modernization of our program, but we cannot disagree on the significance of the threats we face and the need to have a team in place tasked with representing our security interests at the highest national level.

This is not a time to say no to confirming a qualified, experienced nonproliferation expert when so much is at stake in Syria, North Korea, and Iran, and negotiations with Russia—not when we imagine the consequences of what the spread of these weapons can bring. I urge my colleagues to confirm this nominee in the national security interest of the United States and look forward to a strong support of her nomination.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak up to 7 minutes as if in morning business.